DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 356 873 PS 021 270

AUTHOR Nuttall, Jocelyn Grace
TITLE A Comparison of the Employment Experiences of Childcare Workers in Non-Profit and Privately-Owned Childcare Centres: Some Preliminary Findings.
PUB DATE 9 Aug 91
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Early Childhood Convention (5th, Dunedin, New Zealand, August 9, 1991).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Child Caregivers; Child Care Occupations; Comparative Analysis; *Day Care Centers; *Employee Attitudes; Employer Employee Relationship; Foreign Countries; *Job Satisfaction; *Nonprofit Organizations; Preschool Education; *Private Sector; Surveys
IDENTIFIERS *New Zealand (Christchurch)

ABSTRACT

A comparative study of the employment experiences of staff at nonprofit and privately owned childcare centers was conducted in the Christchurch, New Zealand, area. A total of 23 staff members at 3 nonprofit centers and 9 staff members at 2 privately owned centers responded to a survey concerning their qualifications, work history, current working conditions, motivations for working in childcare, and most and least favored aspects of their jobs; the differences among centers at which they had worked; their perceived problems with employers; and their perceptions of their future in childcare and the future of childcare in New Zealand generally. Study findings indicated that: (1) workers in nonprofit centers were better paid, had better overall job satisfaction, enjoyed better conditions of service, were more experienced in working with young children, and had slower rates of turnover than workers at private centers; (2) while almost all staff mentioned a love of children as a motivating factor in their work, staff in nonprofit centers were more likely than private center staff to mention the importance of childcare as a service, their training and career aspirations, pay and work conditions, and enjoyment of regular contact with adults as motivating factors; and (3) staff overall reported that problems of dealing with sick children, poor equipment and facilities, stress, and personal illness were the most difficult aspects of their work. (AC)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED356873

A Comparison of the Employment Experiences of Childcare Workers in Non-profit and Privately-owned Childcare Centres: Some Preliminary Findings

A Paper Presented to the Fifth Early Childhood Convention Dunedin, 9 August 1991

The issue of private ownership and operation of childcare centres has been a topic of intense debate in childcare circles from time to time. On the one hand, some have argued that the involvement of profit-making interests in the care and education of young children is totally inappropriate, whilst others, perhaps more pragmatically, argue that without privately-owned centres Aotearoa/New Zealand would have an even greater shortage of childcare facilities and that many private centres provide high-quality care.

The focus of this paper is on those who do, in fact, 'provide' that care: the childcare workers. This paper is a summary of the findings, to date, of a project being conducted to examine and compare the employment experiences of staff in a small number of non-profit childcare centres with those in an equal number of privately-owned centres in the Christchurch area. To what extent, and in what way, do their experiences as employees differ according to whether they work in a privately-owned centre, or a centre operated under some other management structure?

Some research has been carried out in the United States into this topic. The National Child Care Staffing Survey [1] provides the most comprehensive information to date concerning the characteristics of childcare workers in the United States, including comparisons according to the type of centre in which they were employed. Staff in non-profit and church centres were found to receive higher wages than staff in other types of centres; staff turnover rates were lower in non-profit centres and staff in non-profit centres received more benefits, experienced better working conditions and were more likely to have paid non-contact time, paid breaks and compensation for overtime. Staff in non-profit centres also viewed their work as a career and expressed greater job satisfaction and commitment to their jobs. Educational levels and levels of early childhood education and training were also higher amongst staff in non-profit centres and staff in non-profit centres were found to be more experienced than staff in for-profit centres.

In addition to attempting a similar comparison of New Zealand childcare workers, the present study gives some insight into the perceptions of New Zealand childcare workers generally, how they view their employment and career prospects, their levels of training, and their industrial conditions.

The Context

At the time data was gathered for this project, there were 68 childcare centres in the wider Christchurch area. Of these, 22 were in private ownership (i.e. owned entirely by one individual, or two individuals in partnership, as a going business concern). Of the other 46 centres, these were either owned and/or managed by charitable trusts (ten centres), parent co-operatives (nine centres), an allied institution (e.g. a university; 11 centres) or they were operating as community creches, usually under the auspices of the City Council (16 centres).

The Supervisors of three non-profit centres were written to and asked to ask staff whether they would be prepared to respond, individually and in their own time, to a confidential written survey concerning their work experiences. All three centres agreed and staff duly completed the surveys. At the same time, the Supervisors of three further centres, all privately-owned, were approached with the same request. Staff at one of these centres immediately agreed to respond to the survey and subsequently did so; the others did not.

---

[1] Whitebook, M. et. al. (1989). Who Cares? Child Care Teachers and the Quality of Care in America: Final Report of the national Child Care Staffing Study. (Oakland: Child Care Employee Project)

PS 021270

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
J. Nuttall

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

The circumstances under which the staff of the other two centres did not respond, those at another private centre which was approached, and the implications for staff at fourth centre which was not approached, became worthy of a study in themselves; a fifth private centre eventually agreed to complete the survey and did so. In total, the Supervisors of five privately-owned centres were approached and staff at two of these centres eventually responded with completed surveys.

Because the process of gaining access to staff in private centres, in addition to being very time-consuming, began to highlight dangers for staff as well as practical difficulties for the research, the decision was made to not approach staff at any more privately-owned centres. However, staff from some of the private centres involved made it known that they were eager to be interviewed in person about details of their working conditions and experiences; these interviews served to cast some light on to the possible reasons for the difficulty of gaining access to staff in private centres. (Unfortunately, at the time of preparation of this paper, not all of these interviews have been completed, so the information gained is not presented here.)

Summary of Survey Responses

The written survey was in two parts. Firstly, it asked staff a number of questions concerning their qualifications, both general and in early childhood care and education, their work history, both in childcare and in other positions, and for details of their current working conditions. The second part asked for more subjective information, including their motivations for working in childcare, the most and least favoured aspects of their job, how they perceived differences between their current position and childcare positions they had held in other centres, how they perceived any problems they had experienced with their employer in their current centre or others they had worked in, and how they saw their future in childcare and the future of childcare in New Zealand generally.

In total, nine childcare workers from private centres and 23 workers from non-profit centres responded to the survey; every respondent was a woman. The age range of staff within the two types of centre was identical (18 to 57 years) but the average age of staff in non-profit centres was slightly higher (33.5 years, compared to 29 years in private centres).

One person surveyed from a private centre had no formal qualifications and three of the private centre workers surveyed had no formal qualifications related to early childhood. The proportions of untrained staff were approximately the same in non-profit centres but the spread of qualifications was wider, including two with university study, and there was a greater variety of early childhood qualifications within the group. A more dramatic contrast appeared when looking at experience in early childhood settings (including having raised one's own children) where workers in private centres had an average of three years experience, compared to an average of nine-and-a-half years experience amongst staff in non-profit centres.

A similar contrast appeared when comparing staff turnover between the two types of centre. The average length of time employed in the centre, when surveyed, was ten months in private centres, with the longest-serving employee having worked in the centre for one year and eight months; amongst the non-profit centres surveyed the average length of time employed in the centre was one year and eight months, with the longest-serving staff member having been in one centre for three years and six months. Each category included a centre which had opened within the last two years.

Three of the nine workers from private centres did not know under which award they were employed; in fact, one of the private centres was party to the National Award, the other to the Consenting Parties Award. Six of these workers believed they did not receive conditions above award entitlement, one thought that she did, and two didn't know. Five of the staff surveyed from non-profit centres didn't know which award they were employed under; the other 18 all knew their employers were party to the Consenting Parties Award. Ten of these workers believed they were receiving conditions above their entitlement under the award, three said they didn't receive any additional conditions, and ten didn't know.

Of staff who had been entitled to take leave during 1990, in private centres this ranged from none to 60 days (in one case of extended illness) with an average of 12 days off; in non-profit centres, the range was lower (none to 46 days) but the average greater, at 16.5 days. In the main, those staff who took leave for more than ten days in the year did so during their children's term holidays. Overall, very little leave was taken for personal illness.

A further contrast between the two types of centre was in rates of pay. Four workers in private centres did not know what their hourly rate of pay was, and of those who did, rates ranged from $8.70 to $12.50 per hour. Everyone surveyed from a non-profit centre knew their rate of pay, which ranged from $9.05 per hour (for a reliever) to $18.66 per hour. The average rate of pay in the private centres was $10.77; in the non-profit centres it was $11.75.

Of the 32 women who replied to the survey, 22 were in some form of on-going training. Only six of these were for basic qualifications and almost all of the remainder working towards equivalency with three-year training, chiefly by correspondence.

When asked what had attracted them to work in childcare, the response was, overwhelmingly, a love of children (17 of the staff surveyed in non-profit centres, and five of those from private centres).

> I decided that a job working with children would be a fulfilling and enlightening change. I have always enjoyed the interaction involved with children and the satisfaction received through watching children prosper and thrive.

The next most common reason was the desire to see good-quality childcare provided, although this was mentioned only by staff in non-profit centres.

> A genuine love of children and a desire to nurture them and encourage learning in a fun way. This work offered a challenge because I feel very strongly that there is a need for extremely high quality childcare.

Two of the workers in private centres didn't know what attracted them to the job. Other reasons for choosing to work in childcare included the desire for a job change, being able to take one's children to work, childcare being the only work available, wanting to work with other adults, self-development, career choice and the nature of the job (e.g. being able to spend some time outside). Only one person (from a non-profit centre) was attracted by the pay and job conditions.

The trend toward enjoying working with children was not as apparent, however, when employees were asked why they continued to work in childcare. Four staff of private centres said they enjoyed the children and four mentioned that they felt childcare was important and necessary; one enjoyed working with other adults and one mentioned that the pay and conditions were good. In non-profit centres half the staff mentioned enjoying the children but the next most important aspects (eight responses each) were the pay and conditions, and the enjoyment gained from working with other adults, including parents.

> Simply because I enjoy my job and love the children. The staff I work with are great and have become my best friends. My hourly rate of pay is good and my hours are great.

The next most important aspect (four responses) was that the job gave opportunities to gain qualifications and career advancement. Surprisingly, only one person mentioned the difficulty of finding another job as a reason for staying in childcare.

For staff in both types of centres, the rewards and reactions received from children were the most valued aspect of the job; this was mentioned by almost every worker. Second to this, and mentioned by about half, was the reward of being appreciated by other adults, especially parents.

> Being able to teach and care for the children. Watching them grow and learning, knowing you are part of it and help in some ways. Seeing them so happy!
>
> Happy children. Content and enthusiastic staff. Positive comments from parents and their pleasure in being assured that their children are having a great time.

When questioned about the least valued aspects of the job however, there appeared a much wider and more varied group of responses. Two workers in private centres mentioned that they found dealing with sick children brought to the centre to be particularly difficult. No other aspect received more than one comment from staff in the private centres, but included busy days, tensions between work and home, bad manners in children, the physical and emotional stresses, lack of time being untrained, the challenge of providing activities for the children and feeling uncomfortable about the centre being run as a "business". In non-profit centres sick, neglected or abused children was also named most commonly as the most difficult aspect (nine responses), followed by stress and illness, and lack of equipment or facilities. Several staff from one non-profit centre complained of the inadequacy of the staffroom. Some staff also mentioned friction over staff attitudes to childcare as a difficulty for them; the two following comments were made by staff in <u>different</u> centres, when asked about the most difficult aspects of their job:

> Older staff members who have been out of the workforce for some time [and] don't really believe in childcare (basically believe in mothers and preschoolers being at home). I don't know whether they realise it (it has been pointed out) but this reflects very strongly in their attitude to work and relationships with parents and children.
>
> Having to accept that these young children are at childcare and not at home with their parent.

Generally speaking, staff in both types of centre were now experiencing better pay and working conditions than in centres in which they had worked previously, although a large number of respondents had never worked in another centre so they were unable to comment. Other aspects which staff perceived as being improvements on previous job sites were, in particular, having more staff and the provision of better programmes for the children in their current centre.

When asked about problems they had experienced or were currently undergoing with their present employer, four of the nine workers in private centres had no problems to report. Of the others, problems such as lack of understanding of the work involved in childcare, unreasonable demands, favouritism in dealing with staff and implying guilt when sick leave was taken were mentioned. Overwhelmingly, of the 21 staff who replied to this question from non-profit centres, nineteen reported that they had no problems to report and several mentioned that any difficulties which arose were quickly resolved.[2]

Problems mentioned as having been encountered with previous employers were diverse. The majority of the staff who had worked elsewhere in childcare had at some time been employed in private centres. This group mentioned issues of intimidation, poor staffing, poor facilities, poor wages and conditions, non-unionisation, lack of communication and lack of recognition of qualifications as problems.

---

[2] An interesting issue which arose out of this question was the apparent confusion amongst some staff as to the identity of the "employer" in the centre, with several staff referring directly to the supervisor as the employer. In non-profit centres in particular, the supervisor is frequently a member of the managing group and, because they are in constant contact with staff, they often carry out many of the day-to-day tasks of the employer, such as arranging for relievers. The difficulty for supervisors is, of course, that they are <u>also</u> an employee.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

> [My pay is] much higher, as we are on the Consenting Parties. My other centre, the employer was a slave driver, my qualification was unrecognised by her, so I got paid $2.00 less an hour (even more I think) than I am on now. We also had very long hours of work, 7.30 - 4.30 or 8.45 - 5.45 (we had 1 hour for lunch though), which I found rather exhausting.
>
> Wouldn't pay me for statutory holidays over Christmas. Would leave me as an untrained childcare worker on $6.09 an hour in charge of the centre. I would not get spoken to for about a week if I had one day off sick.

Those who had worked previously in non-profit centres mentioned slightly different issues - poor management and co-ordination by committees, isolation from the employer, lack of communication and poor provision of equipment and facilities.

> Community organised creches run by constantly changing committees are a nightmare. I don't ever want to put myself through that again!

Staff were also asked to identify what they would change about their working conditions if they could. One of the nine employees of a private centre had no desired changes, whereas one-quarter of those in non-profit centres could not identify anything they would wish to change. In both private and non-profit centres the most desired changes were in equipment and facilities.

> Enlarge bathroom.
>
> A larger centre to cater for more children.
>
> More equipment.

For staff of private centres the next most desired changes were to industrial conditions, such as sick leave, whereas in non-profit centres workers next desired more staff, followed by more release time and better conditions. Staff of private centres also desired more recognition for their work, less stress and more impartiality on the part of the employer when dealing with staff.

> Have an hour for lunch, have my non-child contact time. Able to ask for time off without feeling it was going to throw everyone out of order. NO MORE FAVOURITISM!!!

Other factors mentioned by workers in non-profit centres were better communication amongst staff, less structure in the programme offered to the children and a more varied mix of staff ages and talents.

When asked about their future in childcare, staff of both types of centres were generally optimistic, although few saw themselves as staying in childcare for more than the next few years.

> Hopefully opening a childcare centre of my own. I do want to work in another centre before this. Hopefully I haven't completely done my back in before then.
>
> I intend being in childcare for quite a long time - although I hope I will be able to take a break and come back in case I "burn out".
>
> I would like to stay in childcare but I don't want to work long hours. I like finishing at 3 p.m. like I do now. I would maybe like to move onto something, eventually, that deals with the child's development and family more than at the moment. Maybe doing a part-time degree at University is on the cards.
>
> I enjoy working in childcare at the moment but I can't see me working with children forever.

When asked about how they saw the future of childcare in New Zealand however, the responses were overwhelmingly pessimistic.

> I think childcare will be more and more in demand and I feel good centres will have to charge higher fees to continue their standards especially if government funding is cut.
>
> We have come a long way in [the] last few years but [I] feel backward steps approaching.
>
> At the moment it is quite.....shaky. Hopefully they will get all the problems sorted out and the government will come out of the Dark Ages and see what is going on and what is needed.
>
> I don't think it's going to be around very long which is a shame. There [will] be no money for funds, no subsidies.

One reply also expressed concern at the need for childcare:

> As an "old fashioned" person it horrified me to see the attitude today that it is every parent's right to expect someone else to do their childrearing for them. I would like to see them put their children first for a few years at least. I think parents should pay a lot more if they expect quality childcare.

Interestingly, despite differing trends in responses to several of the other questions, it was in these areas of predicting the future of childcare and their own employment paths in childcare that the responses of staff in private and non-profit centres showed the most similarity.

Summary

The results presented here are only a partial summary of the research to date; much valuable information from personal interviews will be included in the final report.

Despite this, it is apparent that similar trends to those found in the United States are appearing, even amongst a relatively small sample of New Zealand childcare workers. Workers in non-profit centres are better paid, overall they have better job satisfaction and enjoy better conditions of service, they are more experienced in working with young children and non-profit centres have slower staff turnover.

Further contrasts arose when staff were asked questions about how they perceived the motivations behind their day-to-day work. While almost all staff mentioned a love of children as being a major motivating factor, staff in non-profit centres were more likely to mention the importance of childcare as a service and/or their training and career aspirations as an important factor, as well as pay and conditions and the enjoyment of regular contact with other adults.

Staff overall found having to deal with sick children brought to the centre and poor equipment and facilities to be the most difficult aspects of their work, followed by stress and personal illness; it was interesting to note, therefore, how little sick leave was taken last year by those answering the survey. Staff of non-profit centres appreciated having more staff as an improvement over previous centres in which they had worked and staff in both types of centres were now experiencing better pay and conditions than in the past (although this was to be expected with recent dramatic changes to award conditions in early childhood).

When asked about problems experienced in dealing with their employer, distinct differences began to appear between the two groups. For staff in non-profit centres problems tended to be material, such as lack of equipment and facilities, or structural, such as poor communication and turnover of management committee members. In private centres however, issues were much more personal, such as favouritism in dealing with staff, unreasonable demands, intimidation, lack of recognition of experience and qualifications and being made to feel guilty for taking leave. Overall, staff in non-profit centres were very happy with the relationship they had with their employer or found any problems quickly resolved. Staff of private centres were more likely to want better pay and industrial conditions, whereas staff in non-profit centres were more likely to want more time for preparation and planning, and additional staffing.

Staff in both types of centre were generally optimistic about their future in childcare, although only a minority saw themselves working in childcare long-term. In contrast to this optimism, concerns about the future of childcare generally were strong, and tended to be centred around the lack of clarity surrounding current government policy.

Conclusion

No attempt has been made here to theorise about the reasons why distinctions should appear between the working conditions and perceptions of staff in private and non-profit centres. To attempt some explanation of why these differences might arise however, some general points can be made.

Firstly, in most privately-owned childcare centres, the owner is on-site during the working day, making the relationship between employer and employee a very personal one and one which exposes the employee to a certain amount of vulnerability. Secondly, for staff of non-profit centres, the identity of 'the employer' is frequently shielded from them by the role of the supervisor; in conducting these surveys, and the subsequent interviews, it has become very clear that the role of 'supervisor' in most private centres is substantially different to that of supervisor in non-profit centres.

A third factor, which would bear further research, in the whole area of how childcare workers view themselves in a 'professional' light. It appears from the survey results presented here that staff of non-profit centres may view themselves in a different light professionally compared to staff of private centres when contemplating the status and importance of their work.

A final factor is the extent to which the need for private centres to return a profit to the owner affects the industrial conditions under which staff are employed, a question which is not addressed directly by the results presented here. To call a childcare centre "non-profit" simply because it is community-based is a misnomer; even community-based centres need to at least break even financially, and there are undoubtedly private centre owners who are motivated primarily by the need for good-quality childcare, rather than primarily by the profit motive. What is of concern for this project however is the way in which the workers perceive the process of centre management, as it affects them, not only in their pay and industrial conditions, but in the more qualitative aspects of their role as employees. From the data already collated and presented here, it appears that there are important distinctions between being employed in private versus non-profit childcare centres.